

# THE LIBRARY ASSISTANT

THE OFFICIAL JOURNAL OF THE ASSOCIATION  
OF ASSISTANT LIBRARIANS

(Section of the Library  
Association)

*Edited by T. E. Callander*

Fulham Public Libraries



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## EDITORIAL

THE next meeting of the Association will be held at the Limehouse Library, Stepney, at 7 p.m. on Wednesday, the 10th February.

*Chairman* : The President of the A.A.L.

*Speaker* : Miss E. J. Carnell, West Sussex County Library, Bognor Regis (representing the S.E. Division).

*Subject* : The County Library and its contribution to the library service.

Light refreshments will be served from 6.30 to 7 p.m.

The Limehouse Library is in the main Commercial Road, ten minutes by bus or tram from Aldgate or Aldgate East Station, Underground Railway. The 67 tram from Aldgate passes the Library. Bus routes 5, 15, 23, 40, 123, 151, 223 from all parts of London, *via* Aldgate, also pass the Library.

The Limehouse Library has recently been reconstructed at a cost of £20,000 and was re-opened last May.

Mr. L. Stanley Jast, F.L.A., late Librarian of Manchester, and sometime President of the Library Association, in passing to his honoured retirement, has not lacked tributes from his colleagues. With his laurels thick upon him, Mr. Jast stands in small need of garlands from THE LIBRARY ASSISTANT. We believe that he has not infrequently, during the past year or so, had cause to disapprove of us. We trust that, on this occasion, even his great modesty will not lead him to contradict us when, with vivid memories of his farewell appearance at Cheltenham, we say to all the world, "This was a man."

Your attention is drawn to the appearance of the LIBRARY ASSOCIATION YEAR-BOOK, 1932, which is reviewed in this issue. We commend this publication to the notice of all assistants, as we are convinced that it should be in the hands of all who work in libraries.

### LIBRARY ASSOCIATION LONDON AND HOME COUNTIES BRANCH

The next meeting of the Branch will be held at 7 p.m. on Wednesday, the 24th February, 1932, at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, Keppel Street (Gower Street), W.C.1.

Professor M. Greenwood, D.Sc., F.R.S., Chairman of the Library Committee of the School, will preside.

A paper on "The Library of the School of Hygiene" will be read by C. C. Barnard, Esq., B.A., F.L.A., Librarian.

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### Annual Business Meeting and Balance Sheet, 1931.

At the conclusion of the meeting members will be conducted over the Library and Museum.

PUBLIC LIBRARY,  
WATFORD.

GEORGE R. BOLTON,  
Hon. Secretary and Treasurer.

A dance for members and their friends has been arranged by Messrs. W. C. Pugsley and W. B. Stevenson. It will be held on Wednesday, 2nd March, at the Samson Clark Hall, Mortimer Street, W. Tickets (4s., including refreshments) may be obtained from these gentlemen, or from any member of the Council.

At the next meeting of the Association, on the 10th February, two honorary auditors will be appointed to audit the accounts for the eighteen months ending 31st December, 1931. Nominations should reach the Hon. Secretary not later than the first post on the 10th February.

## IN THE WILDERNESS

By DOUGLAS F. WARREN (*Northamptonshire County Library*)

In his presidential address to the Library Association at Cheltenham last year, Colonel Mitchell said: "The years which have elapsed since the War have witnessed the gradual emergence or recognition of a wholly new epoch in library history." Unfortunately, however, according to the *Departmental Report on the public libraries in England and Wales, 1927*, there are some 145 libraries serving areas with populations of 10,000 or under, which, mainly through lack of funds, must have been unable to contribute very much to this advancement of which Colonel Mitchell speaks.

In its recommendations regarding these urban libraries, the *Departmental Report* makes the following points:

1. That the average allocation of expenditure in urban libraries is: books and binding, 22 per cent.; newspapers and periodicals, 5 per cent.; salaries and wages, 46 per cent.; other expenses, 27 per cent. Library authorities which show large variations from these figures will be wise to initiate an enquiry into this matter.
2. That no library should be satisfied with a stock of books which represents less than thirty volumes per hundred of population served.
3. That in the case of small areas the County Council should provide the

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service, and if the service provided is superior to that which it is possible to provide generally throughout the county, should charge the additional cost on the area.

According to the comparative statistics given at the end of the *Report*, the standard figures for expenditure for libraries serving populations between 5,000 and 10,000 are: books and binding, 13 per cent.; newspapers and periodicals, 12 per cent.; salaries and wages, 47 per cent.; other expenses, 28 per cent. And for those serving under 5,000: books and binding, 11 per cent.; newspapers and periodicals, 16 per cent.; salaries and wages, 39 per cent.; other expenses, 34 per cent. These figures, when compared with the average figures given in the body of the *Report*, show that there is a reduction in the expenditure on books and binding, and an increase on newspapers and periodicals, proportional to the decrease in the population served.

The facts given below regarding two libraries actually in existence to-day are a further illustration of this same point. In order that the libraries may not be easily recognized, the figures have been slightly altered.<sup>1</sup>

Library "A" was founded in 1896 with the help of a grant from Andrew Carnegie, and now serves an urban district with a population of 4,500. Its membership is approximately 900, but one wonders if this represents active membership, as the issues for the year were only just over 11,000.

For the year 1929-30 the expenditure was: books and binding, 6 per cent.; newspapers and periodicals, 15 per cent.; salaries, 64 per cent.; other expenses, 15 per cent.; amounting to £145. The receipts, other than from rates, were £9, and the rate levied on the district was 2d. in the £, which is equivalent to a cost of 7d. per head of population served. During the last financial year almost the same amount of money was spent.

The total book stock is approximately 5,000 volumes, including 950 juvenile fiction and 450 books in the Reference Department. In the past £40 has, on one or two occasions, been spent on the purchase of books, but no appreciable amount has ever been spent on their repair. To-day a large number of books in both departments are worn out and unfit for issue, and the non-fiction as a whole is poor in quality.

There is no catalogue whatever, and the books are classified by means of the shelves and their positions on them. The only record of any description there seems to be is a stock book, in which the authors and titles of the books are entered as they are added to the library. The serial numbers given to the books have been so mixed up that they are now entirely useless.

The issues are recorded by entering the borrower's name and the title of the

<sup>1</sup> Mr. Warren has allowed us to inspect the original statistics upon which his article is based. They do not in any way detract from the truth of the conclusions that he draws.—HON. ED.

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book in a ledger, and crossing both of them off when the book is returned, but no comparative statistics seem to have been kept, apart from those given above.

The library is open for six hours daily. In the reading-room there are five daily papers, twelve monthlies, and fourteen weeklies. The librarian has held office for about fifteen years, and although his duties employ him for six or seven hours a day (and include the cleaning of the library and the laying of the fires), he is also employed elsewhere in the town.

Library "B" was founded in 1904, and serves a parish with a population of 2,500. Its membership is approximately 450, and about 8,000 books were issued during the year.

For the year 1930-31 the expenditure was: books and binding, 9 per cent.; newspapers and periodicals, 11 per cent.; salaries, 47 per cent., and other expenses, 33 per cent., amounting to £115, and the receipts, other than from rates, were £8. The rate levied on the parish was 3d. in the £, which is equivalent to a cost of 6d. per head of population served. During the past years, as far as one can ascertain, the expenditure has remained very much the same, and the amount spent on books has never exceeded £10.

The total book stock is just over a thousand volumes, and consists for the most part of fiction, which has been purchased second-hand from such firms as Boots or Harrods.

With the exception of a few bound magazines, there is no non-fiction at all.

The library is open for an hour or two at midday, and three or four hours every evening. In the reading-room there are eight daily papers, the *Illustrated London News*, and the *Smallholder*. The librarian, who is also the caretaker, is employed elsewhere.

In addition to these two libraries, which may be taken as typical examples, there is also the case of a library serving an urban district with a population of just over 14,000. A rate of 3d. in the £ is levied on the district, which is equivalent to a cost of 10d. per head of population served. Its condition with regard to book stock, etc., is very similar to these two libraries.

It is generally accepted that the small independent library is neither economical nor can it hope to achieve by itself the efficient service that is expected of a library to-day. Obviously it cannot hope to be able to comply with the recommendations of the *Departmental Report* given above, and consequently if it wishes to become efficient, it must adopt one of two courses.

The first can only be described as a purely temporary arrangement. An agreement is made between the small urban library and a larger library, usually a county library, by which the larger library lends books to the smaller library in return for monetary payments. This is being done in a number of counties at the moment, the annual charge per hundred books varying from £5 to £7. If this

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arrangement is to be really advantageous, at least £30 or £40 must be spent every year by the small library authority, since, even at the cheapest rate, £40 is only equivalent to about 800 books.

The difficulty is, as will be seen from the examples given above, that as such libraries are already costing quite an appreciable sum (although a sum totally insufficient from a librarian's point of view), it is almost impossible for them to spend any more money. This means that in the largest of them all their book money would be used for the purpose of borrowing books, and in the majority of them they could not find the money to borrow enough books to make any noticeable advancement in their efficiency.

The alternative is that the small library authority should relinquish its library powers to its respective County Council. However, there are many difficulties to be overcome before any success can be achieved.

The type of service which the average county library is providing at the present time is inadequate to meet the demands of such towns. Libraries such as these, which were established under the Public Libraries Act, 1898, have, with few exceptions, separate buildings to keep up. They all spend, in proportion to their expenditure on other items, very large amounts on the supply of newspapers and periodicals, and in addition to this, they employ the services of a caretaker-librarian, with whom it is very difficult to dispense. There is little doubt that in most cases these small library authorities do realize the advantages of relinquishing their powers, but very few of them are either willing or able to economize effectively or to spend more money.

Take the case of the libraries quoted above: one is levying a rate of 2d. in the £ and the other a rate of 3d. in the £, and they are managing to exist by spending a negligible amount of money on the supply of books. They have accumulated a large stock of books which, although for the most part useless, still go out, since there is nothing else to take their place. A great deal of the popularity of the libraries is dependent upon the newspapers and periodicals.

Now, if these libraries were to relinquish their powers to the County Council, they would have to pay in the first case the County Library rate, which would probably be about 1½d. in the £, and the only thing that they would get for this would be the supply of books. All these other amenities would have to be supplied by the districts themselves by means of a differential rate levied by the County Council. Thus it is quite clear that these libraries, if they really desire to relinquish their powers for the sake of efficiency, must either cut down expenses or spend more money.

Since, as has already been stated, very few authorities are in a position to-day to increase their expenditure, how can they reduce it?

The county library would see that the Lending Department was adequately

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stocked, and that the books were kept up-to-date and in good repair. Classification and cataloguing would be carried out at the County Library Headquarters, and a catalogue supplied for use in the Lending Department. In addition, a modern system of recording the issues and all necessary statistics would be introduced. One thing therefore is certain, that by merging into the county scheme, a small urban library would ensure a vast improvement in its supply of books, which is, after all, the principal reason for its existence.

The problem of providing for the upkeep of the buildings, the salary of the librarian, and the supply of newspapers and periodicals, and the building up of a permanent reference library has still to be solved. To deal with the last item first, the Carnegie United Kingdom Trustees are now willing to give a grant, in approved cases, when such libraries relinquish their powers, and the best use that could be made of such a grant would be to strengthen the reference collection.

In those counties where branch libraries have been established (cf. Kent), very few of the branches open every evening, and scarcely one of them attempts to supply newspapers and periodicals. The best way therefore for these Urban Libraries to economize would be for them to have shorter hours of opening and to supply fewer newspapers and periodicals.

Surely it seems ridiculous that any authority should want to spend money on the supply of newspapers when they have only a negligible amount to spend on the supply of books. However, the supply of newspapers is a debatable question amongst most librarians, and certainly none of the small urban library authorities are willing to cut them out. At the same time, a library supplying daily papers must quite obviously be open every day, and must pay a person to be there during the hours of opening. Hence, the supply of newspapers and periodicals is a very important feature, because on it depends the hours of opening, and consequently the salary of the librarian and the cost of the upkeep of the building, and probably it is true to say that in many cases it is responsible for many of these small urban libraries remaining independent.

A possible solution is that for the time being these libraries should suspend (not give up) the supply of newspapers in order that the hours of opening could be reduced to three nights per week. This would also reduce the cost of the upkeep of the building, and would make very little difference to those borrowers using the Lending and Reference Departments.

With regard to the librarian, the present man—since in nine cases out of ten he has another situation—could be retained to look after the building. After all, no *librarian* can be expected to clean floors and light fires as part of his or her official duties, and as in most counties there are one or two branches which open on two or three nights a week, the solution to this difficulty seems to lie in one or two of these branches (for the small urban libraries would become branches) sharing the

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services of a qualified librarian and, of course, sharing the cost of his salary between them.

In view of the present financial crisis, it seems very probable that it will be some time before many of the urban authorities will be in a position to improve the libraries for which they are responsible. In any case, it is quite certain that all those connected with these libraries will have to work very hard, possess untold patience, and above all be prepared to "give and take" upon all sides. Under these circumstances, there is still the hope that one day every library in the country will be regarded as "the brain centre of its community, ministering to the intellectual and practical needs of man, woman, and child."

## VALUATIONS

By FRANK M. GARDNER

### VARIATIONS ON A THEME: TEN BULLETINS

*Characters (in order of their appearance) :*

- Burnley library journal*, October 1931.
- Ipswich library journal*, September 1931.
- Croydon reader's index*, November-December 1931.
- Gilstrop public library magazine*, October 1931.
- Coventry bookshelf*, November-December 1931.
- Hyde bookman*, October 1931.
- Willesden quarterly record*, October 1931.
- Wallasey reader's guide*, October 1931.
- Bulletin : Port Elizabeth*, July 1931.
- More books*, Boston (U.S.A.), October 1931.

AS the artist is bound by his medium, so is the critic bound by his material. Not so long ago I was like to be crushed under an avalanche of reports; now I bow beneath a storm of bulletins. Perhaps it is as well, since I have said so much about reports that I live in dread of being accused of having a report complex. And since I shall almost certainly have to revive the subject next year, reports being hardy, if unsavoury, perennials, a short interment will not be out of place, if I am to disguise the inevitable repetition.

Not that I am afraid of repeating myself. Some authors I know of make a very good living by doing nothing else. Having made a success with one book,

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they very wisely do not attempt to strike out in a new direction, but merely rewrite the success with a new set of characters. About the only thing they cannot repeat is the title, and since that is usually a quotation, it does not matter very much. (The man who said that Hamlet was all quotations would assuredly say now that the Bible was all book-titles.) One sees the principle also in song-successes, and even more blatantly in advertising. The public, bless 'em, don't mind. Their inner consciousness is only penetrated by death.

But I wander—perhaps because I am uneager to start my task, which is, of course, evaluating the bulletins I have before me. I feel very uninspired. I am inclined to write: "All the above publications reach a very high level of monotony," and then go out to see M. Komisarjevsky's production of "The Cherry Orchard," a pleasure of which otherwise I shall be denied. "The Cherry Orchard" would undoubtedly benefit me, while the essay I propose to write will probably lamentably fail to benefit anyone. But no. I have a duty to perform, and I should also be doing some of these publications an injustice. It is only in the mass that they agitate my stomach. Taken individually they are not so bad. They all have faults, of course. The chief one is inevitably that of dullness. I don't know whether I am *avant-garde* or merely eccentric, but it seems to me that a publication intended to be read should be readable. And library bulletins are definitely *not* readable. Lamb would include them with repugnance in his catalogue of books that are not books. They are guides, indexes, lists, anything but what they ought to be—*aperitifs* to the meal the library offers. I cannot understand it. There is no better material than books for interesting writing. There is no class of the community more interested in reading than the librarian. Yet the book in a library bulletin becomes a dead thing, a mere entry in a list, tagged with an uninteresting annotation and an unnecessary collation. Why is it? Why this failure to convey anything of the nature of a book beyond the bare facts of its size, pagination, date, and possibly a snippet of information about the author?

One reason that suggests itself to me is that most library bulletins are modelled on other bulletins. As I said, apropos of something else, titles alter, but the rest is the mixture as before. What is good enough for one is good enough for another, and since imitation, however sincere a form of flattery, is a sure enemy of change, no effort is made towards progress. As an instance of this, I recently noticed in a contemporary the statement that "— have courageously adapted —'s method, and included a series of excerpts from recommended books." Heavens above! What courage is needed for imitation? And why *courage* to use a very sensible idea, as though it were of revolutionary importance? The paragraph gives a very good idea of the timorousness of the library mind when confronted with something only slightly out of the ordinary.

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But that is only part of the trouble, and the lesser part at that. Apart from being chary of experiment, the library bulletin is to my mind entirely wrong in conception. It is based on an assumption which is fallacious. It is assumed that public library readers have a good knowledge of books, that they read the reviews, and only use the bulletin for finding out whether books they are interested in have been added to the library. Now this is wrong. The people who read reviews form a very small proportion of public library borrowers. The general paucity of public proposals proves that. Our readers in general do not choose their books through reviews or even publishers' advertisements. All librarians know how much choice depends on quite extraneous matters, such as binding, colour, and size of print. In a word, the public is not book-conscious (a ghastly term, but descriptive). It should be the chief purpose of the library bulletin to awake that consciousness, to turn people's attention from the details of a book's appearance to the importance of its contents. And it cannot do so by addressing itself to a class of reader that hardly exists. The ultimate justification of the library bulletin is demand. Without demand it is futile. To those librarians who feel inclined to rush into correspondence with circulation figures, I would say this. Free distribution does not connote demand. The only adequate method of estimating demand would be to stop all library bulletins for a month, and wait for the storm of protest from borrowers. I am inclined to think that the hiatus would be almost unnoticed.

My remarks are, of course, general. I suffer, I think, from a form of claustrophobia which evidences itself in the presence of large quantities of library publications. But when I come to examine individual examples, I do see at times a dim perception of the principles I have enunciated.

There is Burnley, for instance. I have spoken of Burnley before, and with respect, though my plea for certain statistics is unanswered, and those advertisements are still there. However, I can forgive Burnley a lot. The feature in the October number is an article by St. John Ervine on "What is a good book?" The only possible answer to a question like that is, "Find out"—a very good answer from the library point of view—and Mr. Ervine, of course, says so. Book-selection is always up to the minute at Burnley. Dates of publication are almost uniformly 1931, which shows (a) that the attention-value of new books is fully recognized, and (b) that there are no gaps to be filled up by remainders. I particularly noticed some very recent additions in the dramatic section—in most cases of plays still running in London. Modern drama is too frequently neglected in provincial libraries. Owing to the fetish among theatrical producers about provincial tours, one often only gets to see a play about two years after London production, and the library should fill in this gap. I was also pleased to see the prompt addition of Churchill's *Eastern front*, Groom's *Life's a lark*, Wilkinson's

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Nelson, and incidentally Middleton Murry's *Life of D. H. Lawrence*, which has the most absurd title I have seen for a long time.

Even more than Burnley does the *Ipswich library journal* fulfil my idea of what a bulletin should be. Its dark-green cover, defaced by Gothic lettering and advertisements, is ugly, and its type is not very well chosen. But the question of format is not of great importance in a periodical publication. The occasional pamphlet must be attractive to secure attention, but the periodical depends on its previous numbers, and good format, though desirable, is not essential. Where this *Journal* scores is in the fact that Ipswich has had the sense to break away from the list, and to some extent from the tyranny of the cataloguing code. The September quarter's number contains an article on some recent books on flying, a selection of the latest biographies, a miscellany, and a short list of reference books. One feature, headed "Some recent additions," seems such a stroke of genius that I am wondering whether I have misconstrued the intention behind it. One always distrusts good ideas unless they are one's own. It is apparently a sort of "rag-bag" into which are thrust all those books which have a limited, though definite, appeal. Such books as *Mate in two moves*, *A Book for mothers*, *The Probationer's primer*, all of which appear in this list, are usually allowed to clutter up a long list, irritating the general reader, who is neither a chess-player, a mother, nor an intending hospital nurse. The form of the entries is so admirable that it is worth reproducing. Here is a typical one:

KINGSTON VERA, *An army with banners*—the romance of missionary adventure.

Just that. And what more is needed?

Quite half of this bulletin is devoted to announcements of the enormous number of extension activities maintained at Ipswich. Lantern lectures, musical lectures, concerts (by the Library singers), play-readings (by the Library players)—there must be something on at the library every other night. I like to see this. The library should be the centre of the cultural life of the town. Too often it is a hanger-on. I said last month that whatever happened at Croydon became unalterably a part of library technique. It seems now that the whole world waits on her fiat. Talking about the *Reader's index*, a writer in the current issue says: "It circulates among libraries all over Great Britain, and as far as Canada, and the United States, India, Japan, Australia and New Zealand, Germany, and South Africa. In all these places the lists of books published are regarded as authoritative, and representative of the cream of England's literary output." Now I stand in some awe of Croydon. And the spectacle of Croydon patting herself on the back is not unseemly. But this is an occasion, one feels, when the well-known American comment on such statements would not be out-of-place.

I have to admit, after examining the list in the current issue with great gravity, that Croydon's book-selection is first-class. But I found to my joy that it is not

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infallible. I would not ordinarily pick out a few items in a consistently good list, but just this once I think I am entitled to an attack slightly below the belt. And Angell's *Public mind*, Needham's *Sceptical biologist*, and Huxley's *Vulgarity in literature*, all of which belatedly appear in this issue, are not ordinary books. But perhaps I am wrong in thinking they deserved more prompt addition. *Cream* takes some time to settle, and perhaps it is thought that the patience of the reader at Croydon is rewarded by the appreciation of the librarian at Osaka and Cape Town.

I like the first instalment of the list on the crisis, *Money and the gold standard*. It suffers, though, from being rather over-full, for the whole list need not then have been divided. By the time the last instalment appears the crisis will (if we are to believe our politicians) be over.

I often receive publications the source of which puzzles me for a time, my geographical knowledge, especially of the hinterland of Lancashire and the Midlands, being lamentably small. And until I found that the *Gilstrap public library magazine* really emanated from Newark, I was racking my brains as to where the deuce Gilstrap might be. The problem was important, because Gilstrap, I thought, is a place that appreciates good printing. Neat cover, plentiful, almost lavish, use of white space in the setting-out, clear type—the format of this magazine puts to shame that of many of its neighbours. There are not many books mentioned, but they have evidently been carefully chosen. I like the annotations. Their author performs no mental gymnastics in their writing, but they have a quality which many annotations lack—the books appear to have been read.

I feel almost sure that whoever wrote the note for Renier's *The English, are they human?* in the *Coventry bookshelf* had not read the book. If he had, then its spirit had passed him by. "Observations made and theories evolved during seventeen years of English life." It sounds like one of those life-works which make one reflect on the necessity for some people living. The point is all the more noticeable, because the extract given on a previous page is calculated to send one to the book in joyful anticipation. For the rest, the *Coventry bookshelf* is—the *Coventry bookshelf*. A neat and tidy piece of work which I cannot charge with any faults except those of its contemporaries. I was more interested in the other matter which accompanied my copy. The two leaflets *Religious book-week* and *Coventry libraries and the Sunday schools* are delightful in format, and the lists of books are not too long to be interesting. And the three book-marks on show issued by the Coventry Opera House are a good example of desirable co-operation. Each gives a summary of a particular play, and mentions other plays by Shaw in the library. The theatre benefits by the advertisements, and the library through the increased interest in the drama.

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I looked with special attention into the *Hyde bookman*, because this number happens to be the first. It is, unfortunately, on traditional lines, which saddens me. But I have hopes. The *Hyde bookman* has not, like a new commercial publication, started with the big splash which is the prelude of progressive decline, but begins modestly with the intention of expansion. Its avowed purpose is "of supplying all users of the library services with a list in permanent form of all books added to the library." If it is found desirable to supplement this by the more important one of aiding users to make their choice, then I shall look forward to further numbers with interest.

I will lump the *Willesden quarterly record* and the *Wallasey reader's guide* together, because I cannot raise much enthusiasm for either. I raised my hat to Willesden last month. I regret that I must keep it firmly on my head this. One reads the *Quarterly record* with a sense of despair. The books are there; conscientiously recorded, and in most cases described; but there is no attempt at interpretation. *The Uncelstial city* is no more important than a book on embroidery. Less, because the book on embroidery has quite a full note, while *The Uncelstial city* is just described as poems (in brackets). Modern poets are not for everyone, I know, but surely Mr. Wolfe deserves better treatment than a mere mention?

If Willesden is bad, Wallasey seems worse. Willesden does at least attempt description. Wallasey does not even do that. Not more than half a dozen notes in eleven pages of list, and those confined to the barest sentence. Such books as Liam O'Flaherty's *I went to Russia* deserve a note, and a book of the peculiar nature of *Archy and Mehitabel* does more—it demands it.

And now for a short journey abroad in search of solace. I do not find it in the *Bulletin* of Port Elizabeth, which is just another list. There is someone at Port Elizabeth who can write really good annotations, but they are lost in the wilderness. He also has good books to write about, for the list is remarkably complete. The books are there. The interpretation is there. All that is wanted is prominence, and then the *Bulletin* will more fully bear out the promise of its really delightful cover.

Then on to Boston. I have described *More books* before, but its dignity fascinates me. I do not wholly approve of it, but it has the distinction of being unique. I mention it now chiefly to acknowledge the compliment the editor pays me in the current number of reporting my previous remarks on his journal. It is not often that I achieve the dignity of quotation. Thank you, Boston.

And that is all. If in the future I notice signs of reform, if I see the lists shrinking, the collations being sloughed, and the "library notes" being recast, I shall feel that I have not missed "The Cherry Orchard" for nothing.

But I am afraid that I have more faith in Chekhov than in librarians.

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### THE DIVISIONS

#### SOUTH WALES AND MONMOUTHSHIRE DIVISION

**O**N the 11th November, 1931, the Division paid a visit to Pontypridd, by the kind invitation of Mr. May, Chairman of the Pontypridd Public Libraries Committee, and Mr. W. Cowdry, the Chief Librarian. In the afternoon the members had the novel experience of inspecting and descending the Great Western Colliery Mine, under the guidance of Mr. May, who was formerly an Inspector of Mines. After tea the Division inspected the Library, which has been reconstructed and reorganized by Mr. Cowdry, who before his present appointment was a member of the Cardiff Public Libraries staff, and listened to an account of the growth and development of the Library by Mr. May, who paid an eloquent tribute to Mr. Cowdry. After the usual votes of thanks an informal whisky drive was held.

The Annual General Meeting and Christmas Party was held at Cardiff on the 23rd December. In his report the Secretary stated that during the year the membership of the Division had increased by 29, the present membership being 95. Five meetings had been held during the year, and the Division was indebted to the various librarians and authorities for their generosity in allowing these meetings to be held. The Secretary also spoke of the work of the Divisional Representatives on outside bodies, and dealt at length with the formation of the Welsh Branch of the Library Association. The programme for the next session was outlined, and various current activities of the Division, such as the Enquiry Committee on an "Index to Welsh Periodicals," referred to.

The election of Officers and Committee for 1932 resulted as follows:

*Hon. President* : Mr. Harry Farr, F.L.A. (Cardiff).

*Hon. Vice-President* : Mr. John Warner, F.L.A. (Newport).

*Chairman* : Mr. L. A. Burgess, F.L.A. (Cardiff).

*Vice-Chairman* : Mr. C. Sexton, F.L.A. (Cardiff).

*Treasurer* : Mr. W. J. Collett (Newport).

*Secretary* : Mr. Ellis Sellick (Cardiff).

*Asst. Secretary* : Miss G. Llewellyn (Cardiff).

*Committee* : Messrs. L. Cox, E. H. Ellis, F. MacDonald (Cardiff); Mr. E. J. Hoskins (Bridgend); Miss V. Capon, Miss P. Craze (Cardiff); Miss Hiles (Newport).

After a supper (complete with Christmas cake and pudding !) the members enjoyed an impromptu concert (the most popular item of which was the "Welsh School of Librarianship"), followed by dancing.

ELLIS SELLICK, *Hon. Secretary.*

## The Library Assistant

### MIDLAND DIVISION

The first meeting of the new session was held in Birmingham on Wednesday, the 16th December, 1931, when about thirty members assembled at the Birmingham School of Printing. They were welcomed by the Principal, Mr. Leonard Jay, A.R.B.S.A., who conducted them over the building, demonstrating and explaining the varied work of the school, including monotype and linotype machines, and lithographic and four-colour processes. After meeting at the Rita Café for tea, the members reassembled at the Birmingham Reference Library for the evening meeting.

This took the form of a series of papers arranged by Miss A. M. Goodwin (Birmingham), who opened with "The New biography: a general survey," in which she maintained that Strachey and Ludwig, followed by Maurois and Guedalla, were the pioneers of new biographical methods, and that they had proved that real people could be as interesting as characters in fiction. Other contributors were Mr. J. H. Davies (Birmingham) on Lytton Strachey, Miss C. E. Thwaites (Birmingham) on André Maurois, Miss J. M. Overton (Coventry) on Emil Ludwig, and Mr. H. Chaundler (Wolverhampton) on Philip Guedalla. The original and different lines of treatment taken by each speaker contributed in no small measure to the success of the meeting, which concluded with a vote of thanks to the contributors, proposed by Mr. F. J. Patrick and seconded by Miss M. Atherton (Wolverhampton).

H. S.

### ET CETERA II

• By STANLEY SNAITH

#### BARTER IN CORPSES

I HAVE read somewhere that the crocodile (or is it the alligator ?) bears upon his back, as a sort of permanent paying guest, a small bird. The bird is his parasite. By proffering little morsels of fish to his host, he is assured of a safe and halcyon existence. The librarian outdoes the crocodile. He nourishes, and is nourished by, parasites of several species. The bagman is one. He plies his trade a shade more apologetically nowadays. The second-hand bookseller is another. The second-hand bookseller is the Sovereign Lord of Body-snatchers. Long after a book has been, one had thought, decently buried, he disinters it and offers his ghastly spoil to the librarian. I have just been studying a catalogue of his offerings. It is fascinating. It is profoundly disquieting. It is typewritten in two columns. It is enormously long. The items it enshrines are recommended

## The Library Assistant

as being ideal "for replacement purposes." The prices vary from half a crown to three and sixpence. It is pointed out, as the crowning conclusive inducement, that many of the items are out of print. I am not surprised. There is a maximum age beyond which no book (unless it be a Work of Literature) can decently exist. The majority of this parasite's books are so ancient that there seems to cling about them, as about a ravished sarcophagus, the faint but unmistakable odour of antiquity. There was a time—quite conceivably there was a time—when a new novel from the pen of Mrs. Crespiigny was a literary event of the first magnitude; when F. M. Crawford set adoring bosoms palpitating; when Mrs. Alexander enjoyed, in her saintly way, a reputation comparable with that of Mr. Priestley to-day. But it is singular that anyone should be sanguine enough to list and price (in shillings too) these writers' works now. Libraries are seldom rich enough to be able to lavish money upon such shrivelled mummies. And yet money is lavished in this way. It must be, or the second-hand booksellers would not continue to offer this carrion to us. They would find other prey. It has been said that books are, in the last resort, indestructible—that they have nine lives. It is true. It is mournfully true. The ninth life is spent, in a sort of mustily posthumous existence, unnoticed and undisturbed, on the shelves of public libraries; not *all* public libraries, but indubitably some public libraries. But which public libraries? Which are the establishments so generous of sanctuary, and so modest about their generosity? I wish there were a way of finding out. Are they managed by Librarians of Venerable Age who cherish a sentimental affection for these best-sellers of their youth? Who seriously believe that Crawford, Aguilar, Nisbet, Curtis Yorke, "Zack" (anyone heard of "Zack"?) and the rest of the Great Unslayable are still of importance, still lusted after by a faithful public? It would be gratifying to have these questions answered. Meanwhile, the Body-snatcher continues to present his catalogues, confound his optimism! But he knows his prey. He is not unreasonably optimistic. One wonders, though, what, privately, he thinks of us. It is perhaps fortunate that he is too much of a business-man to say.

## ON THE OPENING OF A PUBLIC LIBRARY IN WHAT WAS ONCE A COUNTRY DISTRICT

*Where the sweet earth was banished, stands  
A heaven made with bands :  
The immortal meadows and the pure  
Waters of literature.*

## ECHOES OF FAR-OFF DAYS

I have been reading, in the new and cheaper edition recently published by Secker, Lord Alfred Douglas's *Autobiography*. A strange, passionate, potty,

## The Library Assistant

absorbing book. Douglas is one of the queerest figures in modern literature. He writes astonishingly badly, worse even than his fellow-incendiary, Crosland. He has no equipoise, no serenity, no sense of orderliness in his writing. Yet he is always interesting, and nearly always exasperating. Almost the whole of his book deals with his friendships and enmities (the majority of his friendships appear to have turned to enmities) with Wilde, Robert Ross, Crosland, Frank Harris, and others. Douglas is a bonny fighter. If he does not relish a row, at least he disports himself, once in it, with vigour and, like the Psalmist, a joyous anger. There are chronicled in this book more libel and slander actions, brought by and against Douglas, than I at least can count; and in many cases the rights and wrongs, the very facts, indeed, are inextricably confused. Douglas is either a man with a persecution mania or a man who has been subjected to a persecution of a consistency and ferocity that must be unique. Yet his spirit remains undaunted and his preposterous conceit in himself undiminished. (In case he should consider a libel action against me, I must state that this is a literary, not a personal, judgment!) He is, for example, on his own confession, one of the few major poets of the age. He admits to a dialectical gift so dexterous, so dazzling, that it worsted Marshall Hall and several other sirdars of the legal profession. He is, again on his own showing, a character of singular sweetness and generosity, possessed of an outstanding physical charm. He has been aided against his persecutors by the intervention of the Almighty Himself. I like his candour. I like his fighting spirit. But he doth protest too much. He alienates one's sympathies, and drives one into taking sides against him. Besides, the squabbles in which he was involved have stalled with the lapse of time: they belong to an age, as remote from ours as the Elizabethan, when everyone wrote sticky little ballades and villanelles, and the Bodley Head was a Home for Lame Thrushes, and *The Importance of being Ernest* was the last word in drama. He has written a book of "old, unhappy, far-off things, And battles long ago." But, again, he is lively and interesting; though perhaps the interest is pathological rather than literary.

### ILLOGICAL BUT UNDERSTANDABLE OUTBURST OF A LIBRARY ASSISTANT ON A SUMMER'S DAY

*Lord, here they come! I must suppress my groans.  
Brown needs the Annual Register or Whitaker;  
Smith pants for Latin lexicons; and Jones  
An annotated Areopagitica.  
Some clamour for the A.B.C. or Bradshaw;  
One wants to know (who cares?) where Merton Abbey lay;  
And this bespectacled student who has bad Sbaw  
Wants Synge and Shakespeare; and another, Rabelais.*

## The Library Assistant

*There is a woodland where, serenely shining,  
The sun drops dancing dapples, green and golden ;  
O there upon the shadowy turf reclining,  
I'll muse on some old poem fragrance-crammed :  
Forgetting and forgotten, unheeded,  
Hour after hour—you British public be damned !*

## THE BOOK SOCIETY

There must be few librarians who have not viewed with a mixture of amusement and dismay the goings-on of the Book Society. The very existence of such a society is a peculiar and pungent commentary on the state of contemporary literary taste. Who on earth subscribes to it ? I never cease to wonder. It cannot be the definitely lowbrow, those who constitute "that craving dragon, the public," as Lamb calls it ; for they are quite content to be catered for by the Misses Hull and Dell and Mr. Hutchinson. It cannot, on the other hand, be the highbrows. No highbrow would permit others, even a panel of resplendent names, to choose his reading for him. There must be a vast class of mezzo-brows who like to bask in the fond belief that they are capable of Enjoying Good Literature, but cannot find their way to it without counsel and leadership. These hungry sheep look up and the Book Society feeds them. How odd ! It must be pleasant and reassuring to have one's spiritual food chosen for one like that. No need to read *The Times Literary Supplement* ! No need to contract headaches over the *Week-End Review* ! No need even to listen-in to the mellifluous advice of *John O'London's Weekly* or *Miss Sackville-West* on the wireless ! You pay your money, and the panel, in the sacred interests of literature, send you each month the prize, the one indefectible pearl, of the publishing output ! So deliciously simple ! After that, however the soured and heartless gentlemen in the literary weeklies may cavil, you know, with a godlike certainty, which is the Month's Greatest Book. And if, on closer acquaintance with the book itself, you experience a qualm, you sternly, as a loyal member of the society, suppress it. For has it not received the papal passport, the exquisite and infallible (or almost infallible) benison of Mr. Walpole and his colleagues ? True, the best of us err ; and even Mr. Walpole and his colleagues have their human moments. There was Wynnton's *Early closing* : the best of the month, no doubt ; but it must have been a singularly undistinguished month. And there was *Red Ike*. That's a Sell, that was ! But an occasional lapse of this kind cannot weigh against the felicity, experienced by members of the society, of being protected, served, shepherded, wet-nursed, delivered from the wilderness of illiteracy, in this sublime and selfless manner. O fortunate mezzo-brows !

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### THE BOOK SOCIETY

*The reverend seigneurs of the Book Society  
Pick the sure snip out of a vast variety,  
And save the herd the agony of thinking . . .  
No, no ! I am not winking !*

### FOR CATALOGUERS

Extract from *The Publisher and Bookseller*, 23rd October, 1931:

Wedderspoon, A. M.: *A "One-Page" commentary on the books of the Old and New Testaments.* (9 $\frac{3}{4}$  x 12.) Manilla. C.S.S.M., 5 Wigmore Street. 2s. 6d.

A "one-page" commentary on the books of the Old and New Testaments.

I commend this annotation, a model of its kind to those cataloguers who believe that all annotations should be frugal, sober, and literal.



### ON THE EDITOR'S DESK

*The Library Association Year-book.* 1932. (Pp. 322, illus., cloth.) *The Library Association.* 5s. (2s. 6d. post free to members.)

IT was not always so difficult to edit a professional journal. Time was when an editor need never be short of copy. When things were slack, and inspiration failed, he took a pot-shot at the Library Association. The Library Association showed no sign that it had been criticized, and everybody else was happy. *Nous avons changé tout cela.* If there are critics, they cannot deny that the L.A. during the past year or two has become really active and of everyday service to librarians. Here is the latest proof of its activity. *The Library Association Year-book*, which is now on sale, is concrete proof that things are being done and being done well.

Handsomely produced, in a binding uniform with the *Primer of Librarianship*, full of useful and otherwise inaccessible information, and most ridiculously cheap at the reduced rate offered to members, the *Year-book* should receive the whole-hearted support of all librarians and assistants. The contents deserve to be mentioned *seriatim*, and with some wonder at the energy and ingenuity that has gone to their compiling. Information is represented by a complete list of the Officers and Council of the Association itself, to which are added the full Committee list of the Council, the Officers and Committees of the Branches and Sections, and a complete list of members. That in itself is worth half a crown. But that is not all. There is a librarian's calendar, giving as far as possible all fixtures for the year 1932 in all parts of the country. The calendar also contains a remarkably full list of anniversaries and dates with literary associations. This

## The Library Assistant

should be of inestimable value to all who are committed to a policy of display work, and who rack their brains to find an occasion for a new exploitation of their stock. Mr. Savage contributes the "Annals of the Association," a feature which I hope will be continued. It is an absorbing record of the progress of the library movement, an object-lesson to those of us who think we are God's last gift to librarianship, and surely a storehouse of memories for those veterans who fought some of the battles that here appear in a brief note.

The Charter of the Association, to most of us a legend, has been resuscitated from whatever strong-room gave it shelter, and is here reprinted in full with an index compiled by Mr. R. Cooper of Battersea. Accompanying it are the By-laws.

The new syllabus is here reprinted in full, as it appears in the pamphlet recently issued at 1s., and, as good measure to poor assistants, the whole of the 1931 examination papers, including the language tests, are printed with it. It will be realized that the Association has not lacked generosity when it is considered that the syllabus and papers have hitherto cost 7s.

The *Year-book* also contains two articles on Library co-operation and the National Central Library, and on Libraries and the B.B.C. Both of these give a useful lead to librarians who have not yet taken full advantage of the facilities for extension offered by these two bodies.

A list of publications of the Library Association—by now an imposing muster—completes the *Year-book*. Further comment is surely unnecessary. It is to be hoped that librarians will support wholeheartedly a venture which deserves success. They themselves will be the losers of an invaluable tool if they do not encourage the L.A. to make the *Library Association Year-book* a hardy annual.

*Copies of the Library Association Year-book may be obtained by members at 2s. 6d., post free, from The Secretary, The Library Association, 26-27 Bedford Square, W.C.1. On sale now.*

## THE LIBRARY ASSISTANT COMPETITIONS

No. 3

(Set by Stanley Snaith)

*A. A prize is offered for the best "cleribew" on any topic appertaining to public libraries or the library profession. In case there are some readers unacquainted with the style of the "cleribew," this sample is modestly offered:*

*How I wish that Brown  
Had not come to town,*

## The Library Assistant

*And in a fit of desperation  
Written his "Manual of Classification."*

But something much subtler than that is hoped for.

B. We offer a prize for the best "blurb" about Dewey's "Decimal Classification," such as might be composed by an enterprising publisher determined to sell this thrilling book not only to the librarian but to the flapper, the lover of "shockers," the Wild West fan, and indeed to the less scholarly public as a whole. Entries should not exceed 150 words.

### RULES

1. Entries, in an envelope marked COMPETITION, must reach the Hon. Editor not later than first post on Wednesday, 17th February.
2. Competitors may use a pseudonym, but must also send their names and address. Entry is limited to members of the Library Association and its Sections.
3. The decision of the Hon. Editor is final, and no correspondence will be entertained.
4. One book prize will be awarded in each class every month. The winners will be asked to select their books from the National Book Council's Bibliography of 3s. 6d. Libraries.
5. The Hon. Editor reserves the right to withhold prizes if, in his opinion, entries do not reach a sufficiently high standard.
6. Any number of entries may be submitted, but no competitor will be awarded more than one prize in any one month.

### NEW MEMBERS

**M**ISS K. E. BURFIELD (Tunbridge Wells); Olive M. Champion (Wiltshire County); R. D. Codlin (Watford); R. L. Newton (Wiltshire County); Marjorie Hiscock (Kingston); Phyllis Lewey (Minet Library); Horace J. Martin, R. G. J. Tully (University College Library); Wilfred E. Maskell (Dagenham); Helen E. G. Rae (Dumfries County); Madge Taylor (Brentford).

*North-Eastern Division.*—Miss D. M. A. Lee (Durham County).

*North-Western Division.*—Miss V. E. Booth, Miss H. Smith (Southport); H. S. Brown, Miss F. M. Lythgoe (Liverpool).

*South-Western Division.*—Florence V. Spiers (Winchester).

*South Wales Division.*—David T. Eaton (Aberavon); Eryl M. Williams (Cardiff).

*Yorkshire Division.*—Elisabeth Wild (Ilkley); K. Smith (Leeds).

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### PERSONAL

**C**ROMPTON.—Miss B. Crompton, Children's Assistant, Chiswick, to be Children's Assistant, Dagenham Public Libraries. Salary, £160-200.

**MASKELL.**—Mr. H. E. Maskell, F.L.A., Assistant, Maidstone, to be Assistant, Dagenham Public Libraries. Salary £160-200, plus £25 for L.A. Diploma.

**MATSON.**—We regret to announce the death of Mr. S. Tidd Matson, Deputy Librarian of Portsmouth City Libraries.

**PURDIE.**—Mr. J. B. Purdie, A.L.A., Librarian-in-Charge, Cricklewood Library, to be Deputy Librarian, Bristol Public Libraries. Salary, £400. Also selected: Messrs. James Revie, H. Sargeant, Stanley Snaith.

### CORRESPONDENCE

TO THE EDITOR,  
THE LIBRARY ASSISTANT.

BRANCH LIBRARY,  
HIGH ROAD,  
CHADWELL HEATH, ESSEX.

DEAR SIR,—

Mr. Gardner, on p. 220 of *THE LIBRARY ASSISTANT*, makes the following statement: "Why print a catalogue in these days when a card catalogue is always available and the books may be seen on the shelves?" Is Mr. Gardner really as innocent as he seems? Does he imagine that, because that horrible (but most necessary and efficient) invention of the card catalogue has come into being, the printed catalogue is finished? Nothing will ever supersede its use and immense superiority to cards; with this proviso, that where the old *complete* catalogue is definitely a thing of the past, the principle of the selected catalogue as an aid to readers is of very real use. It is to the ordinary reader precisely what a map is to the ordinary traveller.

Observation of the use of the Catalogue under review has proved a hundred times over its value in this way. Two thousand copies were sold during the first six weeks of publication. The reprint is selling as rapidly, and when exhausted will show that one in every five readers has purchased a copy, which is a further indication of its fulfilment as a commonly felt want. In one aspect I have achieved distinction; as the first Librarian to be slated in "Valuations" for putting too many *good* books in his libraries, but I should think more highly of Mr. Gardner's intelligence if he had omitted his suggestions for books to be taken out and those to be included.

Yours sincerely,

J. G. O'LEARY, *Chief Librarian.*

## The Library Assistant

BRAMLEY BRANCH LIBRARY,

LEEDS,

14th December, 1931.

TO THE EDITOR,  
THE LIBRARY ASSISTANT.

DEAR SIR,—

Innocent simpleton that I am, I *did* imagine that the open-access library and the card-catalogue had rendered the printed catalogue obsolete. In my child-like faith, I thought that the tendency was to simplify library technique, not complicate it. I admit the principle of the select list, but a select list of 4,000 books approaches the absurd. My attitude towards Dagenham's engaging publication was this. It was obviously produced at a heavy cost, and I did not think that, in these days when adequate book-supply is our paramount concern, the efficient card-catalogue (your own words, Mr. O'Leary !) needed so expensive a supplement. Mr. O'Leary's statistics, though paraded with impressive gusto, support me in that belief. It appears that four out of five readers at Dagenham have no need of such a publication.

As regards the second part of Mr. O'Leary's letter—from which I gather that he does not value my opinions very highly—I never accused him of putting too good books in his library. I merely said that certain books, notably in the literature section, were not necessary to the permanent stock. That such books should be available, I agree, but surely it was not necessary to triplicate and quadruplicate them ? One copy should be enough. An efficient book-exchange system would do the rest, and money would be released for other books.

For one thing, though, I apologize. I was not aware, until the other day, that Fry's *Vision and design* would thus be available in the Phoenix library. I was thinking of the large quarto edition when I criticized its inclusion.

Mr. O'Leary's final charge is too vague to need refutation. Only in the case of Postgate will I admit his point. Falop-Miller's *Mind and face of Bolshevism* is a better book. But that is not in the list either.

Yours faithfully,

FRANK M. GARDNER.

TO THE HON. EDITOR,  
THE LIBRARY ASSISTANT.

HENDON PUBLIC LIBRARIES,

12th January, 1932.

DEAR SIR,—

Your suggestion in last month's LIBRARY ASSISTANT as to the regulations concerning smoking during examinations is, I consider, based on a false argument. Surely it is only a matter of common sense and thoughtfulness that an atmosphere in which thirty or forty—otherwise unfortunate males—are smoking is hardly conducive to clear thinking. Moreover, there are men and women who find

## The Library Assistant

such an atmosphere intolerable. The matter has nothing to do with the objection of women to smoking, but the absence of a protest does not necessarily imply the absence of an objection. Neither do I think your only solace in the mental distress caused by examinations a very effective one: I fail to see how it can help any candidate to attain the one and only object of undergoing the torture of examinations. Perhaps we might have smoking and non-smoking compartments—penalty forty shillings!

Yours faithfully,

FRANCES M. WILEMAN,

(We offer our apologies to the Education Committee. Their attitude is not so pre-war as we had imagined.—HON. ED.)

TO THE EDITOR,  
THE LIBRARY ASSISTANT.

DEAR MR. EDITOR,—

As it was found inopportune to make a public presentation of the wedding gifts to Mr. and Mrs. R. D. H. Smith and Mr. and Mrs. T. E. Callander, may I take advantage of your pages to thank all those who supported my appeal for subscriptions, and to announce that Mr. and Mrs. Smith were presented with a canteen of cutlery, and Mr. and Mrs. Callander a "Berkeley" arm-chair.

With these gifts were conveyed the congratulations and best wishes for felicity in their new "amalgamation" from all members of the Association, and the expression of their appreciation and gratitude to the two couples for their ungrudging service to the Association, either as officers or as members of the Council.

The balance sheet of these funds will be duly presented for audit by the Council's auditors.

Yours faithfully,

R. COOPER.

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## A MANUAL OF CHILDREN'S LIBRARY WORK

By W. C. Berwick Sayers, F.L.A.

(No. 3, The L.A. Series.)

Ready in February.

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